

V. Environmental Screening

In recent years, the environmental considerations associated with transportation construction have come to the forefront of the planning process. Section 102 of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requires the completion of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for projects that have a significant impact on the environment. The EIS includes impacts on wetlands, wildlife, water quality, historic properties, and public lands. While this report does not cover the environmental concerns in as much detail as an EIS would, consideration for many of these factors was incorporated into the development of the transportation plan. These factors were also incorporated into the recommended improvements. Environmental features found in the area are shown in Figures 11 and 12.

Wetlands

Wetlands are those lands where saturation with water is the dominant factor in determining the nature of soil development and the types of plant and animal communities living in the soil and on its surface. Wetlands are crucial ecosystems in our environment. They help regulate and maintain the hydrology of our rivers, lakes, and streams by storing and slowly releasing floodwaters. Wetlands help maintain the quality of water by storing nutrients, reducing sediment loads, and reducing erosion. They are also critical to fish and wildlife populations by providing an important habitat for approximately one-third of the plant and animal species that are federally listed as threatened or endangered.

The National Wetland Inventory showed several wetlands throughout the study area. Wetland impacts have been avoided or minimized to the greatest extent possible while preserving the integrity of the transportation plan.

Threatened and Endangered Species

The Threatened and Endangered Species Act of 1973 allows the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to impose measures on the Department of Transportation to mitigate the environmental impacts of a transportation project on endangered animal and plant species, as well as critical wildlife habitats. Locating any rare species that exist within the planning area during this early planning stage will help to avoid or minimize impacts.

A preliminary review of the Federally Listed Threatened and Endangered Species in the area was completed to determine what effects, if any, the recommended improvements may have on wildlife. Mapping from the N.C. Department of Environment and Natural Resources revealed occurrences of threatened or endangered plant and/or animal species in the area. No threatened or endangered species are anticipated to be